

Other symptoms

Many other symptoms may be present and should be recorded as follows:

- (i) The definition used.
- (ii) Symptoms should be carefully distinguished from one another.
- (iii) The criteria for rating its presence.
- (iv) Additional information, eg severity.

Conclusions

The contributors hope that these guidelines will provide a basis for fruitful research studies, and for inter-disciplinary collaboration essential to this field of research. The guidelines are preliminary and will undoubtedly require further refinement and revision. The authors would welcome comments and suggestions.

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Letters to the Editor

Preference is given to letters commenting on contributions published recently in the JRSM. They should not exceed 300 words and should be typed double-spaced.

The homeopathic conundrum

I read with interest the editorial (September 1990 *JRSM*, p 543) from the Centre for the Study of Complimentary Medicine. It is one of those situations where selecting out the trials gives the best answer. The three trials he quotes: (1) discussing allergy, (2) discussing pollen and (3) discussing the fibromyalgia syndrome are unsatisfactory because of the difficulty of establishing diagnosis and the difficulty in interpreting the treatment regimen and the efficacy. I think it appropriate for me to confine my comments to Fisher's which appeared in the *BMJ* and at the time caused considerable correspondence. There was unease with the trial design and it was difficult to interpret his data, as he did not give pain assessment

and all data quoted was changes rather than original, which makes it difficult to interpret his findings.

I do not wish to be dismissive of homeopathic medicine, but I am pressed to find any study to support the view that it has an effect greater than placebo. The fact that it is equal to placebo providing it does not have side effects may be useful in some short limited conditions. Our study which included a placebo group confirmed that a homeopathic remedy was much less effective than a standard non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug. We too looked at both the patients where the intention was to treat with homeopathy and patients who were going to receive conventional treatment. I note that Dr Lewith has not quoted our study¹.

The case for homeopathy remains unanswered. I am sure the public will continue to support it, but they should be in possession of all the facts not just part of them.

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